

Middle Articles

MEDICAL HISTORY

“Guérir quelquefois, Soulager souvent, Consoler toujours”

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The number of people who have sought for the origin of this quotation must be legion and those who have guessed at its source no less. These words have been used to summarize the vocation of both doctor and nurse. They have been attributed to people as widely separated in time as Hippocrates and Florence Nightingale, Paré and Edward Livingston Trudeau. In a recent paper¹ they were attributed to Oliver Wendell Holmes. The author had taken it from the *Practice of Dynamic Psychiatry* by J. H. Masserman, p. 359 (Philadelphia, 1955). It is significant that of all the quotations found at the beginning of each chapter this one alone lacked the precise reference, the author's name only being given. The fact that these words are found in Latin, French, and English does not make it any easier to document their earliest use. They are found in a window in the New York Academy of Medicine. They are part of the nurses' window in Guildford Cathedral. In a stained-glass window on the history of medicine in the Mayo Clinic they form part of the Lister window, in the description of which the saying is attributed to Trudeau.²

This may be because W. B. James, at a memorial meeting

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FIG. 1.—Bronze statue of Dr. E. L. Trudeau by Gutson Borghum. Formerly at Trudeau Sanatorium grounds, now at Trudeau Institute grounds on Lower Saranac Lake, New York. By courtesy of the Trudeau Institute.

to Dr. E. L. Trudeau in January 1916, told how he had first heard from him a quotation which, they used to agree, briefly and comprehensively described the ideal aim of a physician—“Guérir quelquefois, soulager souvent, consoler toujours”³; or it may be because at Saranac Lake these words are found on the memorial statue of Trudeau in the grounds of the Trudeau Institute (Fig. 1) and beneath an oil painting in the library (Fig. 2).

Since the dedication of the statue in August 1918, if not before, the librarian of the local public library, in common with many other librarians the world over, has sought in vain, far and wide, for the origin of this quotation.

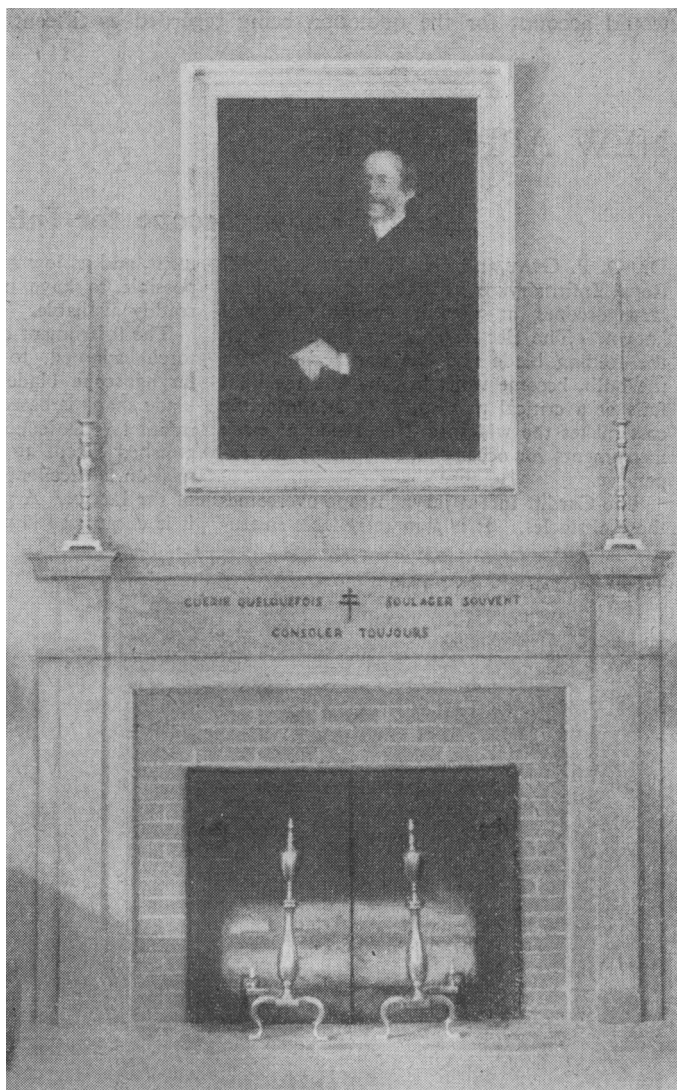


FIG. 2.—Picture of Dr. E. L. Trudeau in library of Trudeau Institute at Saranac Lake, New York. By courtesy of the Trudeau Institute.

When Sir Theodore Fox in his Harveian Oration⁴ used this quotation as "the classical summary of the doctor's vocation" he avoided attributing it to any author. A. L. Donaldson⁵ said that Dr. Trudeau exemplified to the full the maxim of a great French physician which he was very fond of quoting. This may refer to Armand Trousseau; but a search of his works by one librarian⁶ has produced nothing nearer than "... une infirmité sans gravité, qu'on ne peut guère espérer guérir, mais qu'on peut toujours soulager" (*Clinique médicale de l'Hôtel de Dieu de Paris*, 2nd ed., vol. 3, p. 781, Paris, 1865). A similar saying is found in Paré⁷ in *Canons et reigles chirurgiques de l'auteur*: "L'office du bon médecin est de guérir la maladie que s'il ne vient à cette fin, au moins faut-il qu'il la pallie." Witkowski, either alone or in co-operation with Cabanès, has written a number of works comprising medical anecdotes and quotations. In one of these he reproduces words attributed to Asclepiades⁸: "the duty of a physician is to cure diseases safely, quickly and happily." It was not until 1909 that Witkowski and Cabanès published a book⁹ with a chapter headed "Proverbes et dictons sur les médecins" which had original quotations in italic and comments in roman type. Beneath the quotation "La présence d'un Médecin profite beaucoup," which is preceded by the words "Au XV^e siècle, on disait," there is this sentence in roman: "Son rôle est de guérir quelquefois, soulager souvent, et consoler toujours."

In the light of this it may or may not be naive to suggest that in this form the quotation is no older than 1909, or the date when Witkowski and Cabanès collected the material for their book; it is clear, however, that a misreading of this book would account for the quotation being regarded as fifteenth

century or earlier. Perhaps it is one of those sayings which have, so to speak, evolved with the passage of time. Professor Ackerknecht,¹⁰ who provided the reference to Paré, thinks it is proverbial. In the Latin and English versions of Paré's *Canons* there has been some rearrangement as compared with the original French, with the result that there are two now fairly close together which embody the sentiments of cure, relief, and comfort:

6. It is the part of a good Physition to heale the disease, or certainly to bring it to a better passe, as nature shall give leave.

10. You shall comfort the Patient with hope of recoverie, even when as there is danger of death.¹¹

By recording known published references earlier than Witkowski⁹ some light may be thrown on its origin, even if the actual source cannot be found.

REFERENCES

- ¹ *Mod. Med. G.B.*, 1965, 10, 693.
- ² *Bull. med. Libr. Ass.*, 1944, 32, 493.
- ³ *Johns Hopk. Hosp. Bull.*, 1916, 27, 97.
- ⁴ *Lancet*, 1965, 2, 805.
- ⁵ Donaldson, A. L., *History of the Adirondacks*, vol. 1, p. 262. New York. 1921.
- ⁶ Faraday, R., Librarian, Nuffield Department of Anaesthetics, Radcliffe Infirmary, Oxford. Personal communication.
- ⁷ Paré, A., *Les Oeuvres*, 11th ed., p. 767. Lyons. 1652.
- ⁸ Celsus, *De medicina*, lib. iii, 4. (cf. Green, R. M., *Asclepiades: His Life and Writings*, p. 128. New Haven, Connecticut. 1955.)
- ⁹ Witkowski, G. J. A., and Cabanès, A., *Gayetez d'Esculape*, p. 283. Paris. 1909.
- ¹⁰ Personal communication.
- ¹¹ Paré, A., *Workes*, translated by T. Johnson, p. 1119. London. 1634.

NEW APPLIANCES

Cardiff Laryngoscope for Infants

Dr. O. P. GRAY and Dr. M. ROSEN, Cardiff Royal Infirmary, write: The unreliability of laryngoscopes at present available is well known. The electric contacts, both between the folding blade and the handle and with the bulb, become worn in time and the light fails at a critical moment. In addition, the cost makes the widespread provision of extra instruments for occasional or standby use expensive.

The Cardiff infant laryngoscope overcomes these obstacles. It is a more reliable instru-

ment, and its low cost may make it financially possible to have infant laryngoscopes more readily available.

The instrument consists of a standard pen-torch adapted to receive a screw-fitting laryngoscope blade (Figs. 1 and 2). The blade shape is based upon that of the Seward infant laryngoscope, and is made of Perspex, polished except at the tip. The light transmission is excellent and provides a clear view of the larynx. A pen-torch was chosen since it is cheap and is possibly used by clinicians.

It seemed probable that a light used often for other purposes would be in good order when required as an emergency laryngoscope. The blade can be sterilized by immersion in aqueous antiseptic solution.

The laryngoscope is not only satisfactory in use, but is also of value for inspecting the pharynx of neonates, a difficult task without a laryngoscope.

We wish to acknowledge the assistance of Mr. J. Thomas, lately instrument maker at the United Cardiff Hospitals, for making prototype blades. We thank our numerous colleagues for trying the instrument, and the Department of Medical Illustration, United Cardiff Hospitals. We would also like to thank Vickers Medical (Oxygenaire Ltd.), from whom the laryngoscope is available, for their helpful co-operation.

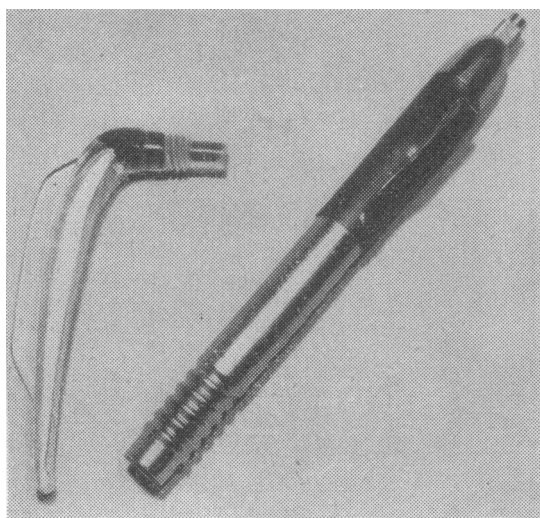


FIG. 1.—Pen-torch and blade.

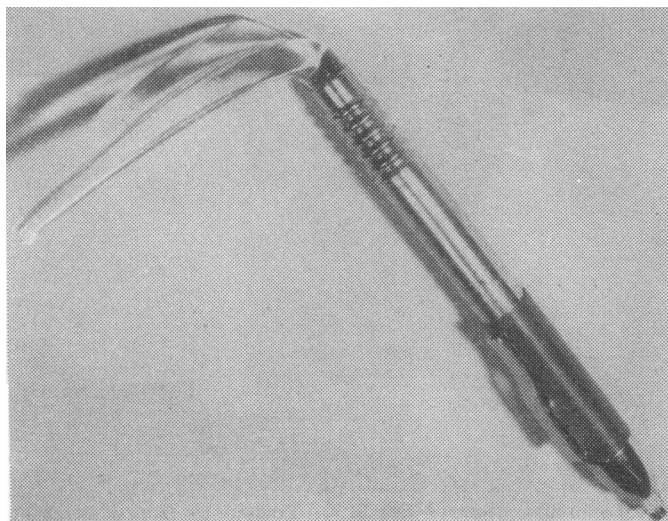


FIG. 2.—The instrument complete.